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ABSTRACT

Motivation has been called the most important variable in foreign language learning. Of the possible motivators, that of desire for integration with the culture of speakers of the language correlates most highly with learning success. American Indian students are faced with the need to integrate to a certain extent with speakers of English. Their hopes for jobs and social advancement largely depend on their success in coping with the language and culture of the larger society. Yet many things in their life situation militate against an integrative motivation. The history of white wrongs against Indians, the prejudice that they encounter, and the increasingly militant anti-white attitude of some members of their race make integrative attitudes difficult or impossible. Tests show a positive correlation between low achievement scores, low English scores, and feelings of normlessness, meaninglessness, negative attitude toward school, and low expectations for the future. Problems that are probably more related to the culture of poverty than to ethnicity become polarized in the direction of ethnic identity. The resulting negative attitudes are directed specifically against the white culture and the effectiveness of English language learning may be impaired. Results of an attitudinal test administered to Indians are included. (Author)

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AFFECTIVE INFLUENCES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG INDIAN STUDENTS

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by

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AFFECTIVE INFLUENCES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG INDIAN STUDENTS

Studies carried out over many years have shown that American Indian students consistently perform below national norms on tests of verbal IQ and on standardized achievement tests (Havighurst, 1970). Many drop out of school at eighth grade, and many have simply been sitting in class serving their time until that level.

While the need to study in English has long been recognized as a problem for non-English speaking Indian children, few earlier reports have seemed to be aware of the long-term nature of this handicap. It was generally assumed that the total immersion provided by the school would bring the child up to the level of his native-speaking peers within a year or two.

That this is not the case has been amply demonstrated by the cross-over that occurs between Indian and Anglo children's school achievement at about grade four or five, when language requirements in the usual textbook become demanding. While middle class Anglo children continue to develop at a normal rate, Indian children's growth slows and the gap widens between the two. In Albuquerque Indian School a recent study showed a mean retardation in reading growing from one year at grade three to three years at grade seven.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language administered at grades eleven and twelve to several groups of Southwestern Indians demonstrated clearly that these students had not caught up in English skills. The composite score of students at AIS stood at the 34th percentile of this test, while Anglo seventh and eighth grade students reached the 90th percentile(1970 testing).

An obvious need is to stressthe teaching of English as a second language, rather than to depend on total immersion. However, the results of TESOL efforts have not been especially successful. Drills and pattern practice improve certain surface aspects of the students' language, but higher level abilities still do not develop.

The studies of Lambert and Gardner (1959) indicate that a positive feeling toward speakers of a language is one of the variables most highly correlated with successful learning. Lambert calls this integrative motivation— wanting to learn a language because you like and want to be able to interact successfully with its speakers.

Another important motivator is the need to use the language for instrumental purposes. Indian students in an English speaking school should certainly have this need.

Searching for ways to help students improve their English, we decided to look more closely at the motivation situation. Integrative motivation, we felt, would be demonstrated by evidence of positive feelings toward English-speaking people and environments. Instrumental motivation would be shown by attitudes of goal-directed activity, feeling of ability to succeed, and a generally hopeful attitude toward the future in an English-speaking majority culture.

In general, we theorized that students who are poorly prepared in English would not concentrate on English improvement unless they wanted to and thought it would do them good.

A study of the attitudes of 11th and 12th grade students of AIS toward the people in their lives was carried out in 1970, reported at the AERA convention in February 1971(Scoon, 1971). A semantic differential

test showed that the students negatively evaluated Anglo teachers, school, and dormitory attendants-- probably the main English speaking people in their environment. We concluded that there was little evidence for an integrative motivation among these students.

The present study examines attitudes related to instrumental motivation. It includes elements of possible alienation toward the life situation, achievement motivation, and specific attitude toward school. Only the part of the study concerned with alienation will be described here.

We hypothesize that the student who shows feelings of alienation from his world will not be strongly motivated to do what he must do to improve his achievement. Low achieving students such as those at Albuquerque Indian School will show alienated attitudes.

Design of the Study

An Attitude Toward Life questionnaire was developed out of the most discriminating items on a much longer test used by Bernard Spilka in a study of Oglala Sioux (Spilka, 1970). The test items used, and the frequency of each response appears on page 11-14. On the test itself, of course, the questions were randomly ordered and mixed with achievement and school attitude statements.

The components of alienation included in the test were:

Powerlessness. A feeling that the world is full of insoluble problems, that one is not in control, that it is useless to make an effort to get ahead. This feeling was cited by Coleman (Coleman 1966) as having

the highest correlation with low achievement of Indian students.

A Conformist Protestant Ethic. The idea that a man will succeed if he works hard, that the environment is responsive to individual effort, that school is of instrumental value for real life, and that the future is going to be good for those who make the effort.

Meaninglessness. Luck determines a person's life, not effort. The world is not an orderly place and you cannot depend on its rules.

Social Isolation. The individual is all alone in the world, he cannot depend on other people.

Normlessness. There are no dependable values; the person has to construct his own code and figure out how to get along. This is similar to the concept of "anomie," a condition that Durkheim and others have suggested develops in situations of acculturation. The bearer of the culture under attack, or the less dominant culture loses faith in his traditional values but does not internalize values of the dominant or attacking culture. This condition might be particularly likely to exist in young persons who have been physically removed from the environment of their own culture for long periods during most of their lives.

The test was administered to all students of Albuquerque Indian School in grades 9 through 12 who were in school at the time. There were 138 papers, thought the number of responses on different statements varies, since some were blank or otherwise unusable.

There were 69 boys and 69 girls tested. By grades, they were: Ninth grade: 41; 10th grade, 37; 11th grade, 33; 12th grade, 27. Tribal division is: Navaho, 47; Mescalero Apache, 32; Rio Grande Pueblo, 36; Zuni, 15; Ute, 8.

The test was given in the students' classrooms. A random sample of papers were carefully examined for consistency of response, and we feel confident that most students actually answered thoughtfully.

No attempt was made to deal with individual scores, since we felt that in tests of this kind, individual papers represent too many purely personal variations. We were interested at this time in finding central trends, to compare with the central trend of poor language achievement that we have identified as one of our students' major problems.

The only difficulty we experienced in giving this test was explaining why there were no right answers, and therefore no grades. Students found this hard to believe, as they did on the Tennessee Self Concept test given last year (Blanchard and Reedy, 1970). They have been thoroughly conditioned to expect grades whenever they take a test, and some remained suspicious to the end, feeling that somehow we were going to grade them despite our assurances. This attitude may account for the direction of some answers, if students felt that they knew which we would consider "right." This in turn may account for some inconsistencies in the total response pattern.

Method of Analysis

The papers were subjected to a frequency count of responses. The frequencies were summed over the items of each subscale, and a mean frequency obtained for the agree, undecided, and disagree ends of the response scale. These mean frequencies were converted to percentages, for easier comparison.

Results

Scale	Statement number	N of responses	% agree	%undecided	%disagree
Powerlessness	1-8	125	48	14	38
	9-17	138	49	25	26
Conformist, Protestant Ethic	18-25	125	67	18	15
	26-33	138	54	24	22
Meaninglessness	34-40	125	44	15	41
	41	138	35	29	36
Social Isolation	42-47	125	32	28	40
	48	138	34	22	40
Normlessness	49-54	125	35	31	34

(Responses on this scale were reversed on statements 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 so that a high score on the "agree" end would represent conformist ethic.)

Discussion of Results

The students were in strongest agreement with the Conformist Protestant Ethic statements, which would ostensibly show good adjustment to the demands of the majority culture, and no evidence of alienation. The highest agreement (over 70%) was found with the statements "Most of the time I feel that the work I am doing is important and useful," "You can always find friends if you show you are friendly," "If a man will work hard and get the right training he can be pretty sure of getting a good job later on," "If one

works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself," and "What you learn in school is useful all through life."

One can hear in these statements an echo of the kind of things teachers and counsellors say. If the students have incorporated these ideas into their system of real beliefs, then they expect hard work to lead to success, and they find school to be of instrumental value.

The statement that found most students undecided was "As I see it now, the future looks pretty empty for me." Most other statements were balanced evenly between agreement and disagreement.

One wonders whether the positive statements were taken as generalizations which are the "proper" way to believe. If the student really accepted all of the Protestant ethic statements as applying to him, then he would not see an empty future for himself.

The relatively high percentage of students who agree with statements expressing powerlessness and meaninglessness support the findings of Coleman with regard to the Indian group. Students especially agreed with the statement "Things are changing so fast these days that you don't know what to expect from day to day " (57%) and "In order to get along in the world it's best to do what you are told." (62%). This may reflect a school environment in which students seldom have much control over changes, and have learned survival techniques in relation to teachers.

Agreement with the statement "A grown-up person doesn't have to depend on his family, church, or friends " (56%) seems to indicate a longing for independence that is probably characteristic of many young people in the middle teens, looking forward to a greater degree of autonomy than they presently feel.

Forty-four percent of student responses indicate that success is to them a matter of luck or "the breaks," compared with the 67% who say that hard work will bring success. Responses on this part of the test lead one to question the degree to which the Conformist Protestant sthic has really been internalized in these students.

Social isolation is apparently not an important problem to segregated boarding school students. They have large numbers of tribal peers available for friends, and do not have to attempt to interact with outsiders. It will be interesting to compare the results of this scale between boarding school students and public school students who will be tested later this year.

On the Normlessness or "Anomie" statements, students were almost evenly divided between agreement, undecided, and disagreement. The largest agreement was with the statement "Sometimes it is all right to get around the law if you don't actually break it." (54%). Highest disagreement was with "You have to be a little bit bad to make money these days." (56%) These seem contradictory, and one wonders if the students were reacting negatively to the word "bad," since the implications of the two statements are quite similar.

Summary

There is support in this study for the hypothesis that some Indian students at AIS are experiencing feelingsthat contribute to alienation. They feel a lack of control over their environment, and a sense of dependency. They seem to believe that success is a matter of luck though a majority say that it will come from hard work. They seem to be confused between the tenets of the conformist Protestant ethic and feelings about their own possibilities.

In earlier times, some Indians certainly accepted the Protestant ethic fully, and attained success in its terms. The Indian teachers in BIA schools are generally strong advocates of this attitude. Many students apparently no longer trust these beliefs enough to allow them to guide their actions. While believing that hard work is the key to success, they do not believe it enough to want to do the work. Perhaps they have seen too many examples in their own families of failure that came in spite of an individual's best efforts. They do not seem to have adopted seriously alienated or militantly anti-social attitudes, but they are confused about the extent to which an individual can control his fate. This confusion coupled with poor English and the resulting poor school achievement compounds the problem of developing motivation, which must be built from an interaction between aspiration and success.

What We Can Do

Teachers of English (as well as all other subjects) can attend specifically to the education of their students in the affective domain. Students who evidence confusion about their aims, values and possibilities need a great deal of help in realistically sorting out this confusion. Those of us who have come to believe strongly that language learning success will come to those who have something they want to say, and someone to whom they want to say it in that language, feel that affective education will involve these student with English far more effectively than pattern practice and programmed drill.

If the students find that they can learn about the really important things in their lives just by making the effort to express themselves in

English, we will find them talking. This has been demonstrated in classrooms that I have visited repeatedly. The quiet, monosyllabic Indian students will soon be interrupting each other to get a chance to talk, if the discussion concerns things they really want to know. Whenever they feel that they can learn something they want to learn, the language will grow to meet the demand. A student will work hard to find a means of expression for an idea he wants to express. Perhaps the area of affect is one of the first places we should seek for the content of lessons that will motivate the student to improve his English. When English improves and attitudes toward the English-speaking world become clarified, Indian students' achievement scores will go up.

Alienation components of Test of Attitude	Response frequencies				
	Agree completely	Agree	Undecided	Disagree a little	Disagree compleely
Powerlessness:					
1. Trying to figure out how to get ahead in life is just too hard.	18	42	28	23	13
2. Things are changing so fast these days that one doesn't know what to expect from day to day.	43	37	24	16	4
3. I feel that I just can't do anything right.	10	32	25	37	21
4. I often feel as if it would be good to get away from it all.	17	23	38	30	17
5. It's getting harder and harder to have a happy family.	21	20	35	26	23
6. In order to get along in the world it's best to do what you are told.	48	38	8	20	11
7. Raising a small child today makes anyone worry a lot.	32	26	38	19	9
8. These days a person must look out for himself, since there is no one else to depend on for help.	37	36	18	25	6
9. Most people don't know how much their lives are run by other people.	24	43	43	15	10
10. Today a person can hardly do the things he would like to do.	25	43	29	26	14
11. Sometimes I have the feeling that other people are using me.	14	39	42	22	20
12. People are too busy to help each other today.	20	45	22	34	16
13. There are so many problems to deal with today that sometimes I could just "blow up."	30	42	35	22	8
14. People say so many different things that one does not know what to believe.	34	40	38	20	5
15. There are so many ideas about what is right and wrong these days that it is hard toknow how to live your own life.	30	40	35	25	7

16. These days it's hard to make up your mind about anything.	19	59	30	23	4
17. Sometimes I feel that I am not sure where I'm going in life.	27	37	41	20	11
Conformist, Protestant Ethic as opposed to anti-social hopelessness					
18. Most of the time I feel that the work I'm doing is important and useful.	63	39	10	7	4
19. One can always find friends if he shows that he is friendly.	76	28	8	5	7
20. The kind of work a person does is one of the most important things in his life.	55	33	16	15	6
21. If a man will work hard and get the right training, he can be pretty sure of getting a good job later on.	84	19	11	4	7
22. When everyone else gives up on you, you can always rely on your family for help.	26	44	28	17	9
23. Success is more a matter of real ability than luck.	42	36	32	9	5
24. There is not much chance that people can really do anything to make this country a better place to live in.	21	23	41	29	11
25. In most ways, life seems worthwhile.	34	43	29	11	8
26. It seems to me that people are acting more and more like animals.	24	25	36	23	29
27. So many people do things well that you might just as well not keep on trying.	31	33	40	22	11
28. If I could live well without working, I would not work.	50	22	35	17	13
29. Nothing seems to turn out right anymore, so why even try.	38	36	39	15	9
30. As I see it now, the future looks pretty empty for me.	29	22	49	22	15

31. If one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself.	73	28	22	10	4
32. Usually I feel that I can control what happens to me.	24	48	35	24	4
33. What you learn in school is useful all through life.	70	35	18	5	9
Meaninglessness					
34. With so many different religions around, one doesn't really know which to believe.	29	29	23	24	20
35. If you want to be liked the best thing to do is go along with the crowd.	14	39	28	23	21
36. There is little one person can do to make the world a better place in which to live.	21	28	28	25	22
37. A grown-up person doesn't have to depend on his family, church, or friends.	47	24	21	18	15
38. There is little chance to get ahead on a job unless a man gets a break.	11	29	50	24	11
39. Getting a good job usually depends on being lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.	28	33	21	24	19
40. A person's future is a matter of luck.	22	25	25	29	24
41. Most of the unhappy things in my life have been due to bad luck.	21	27	39	28	22
Social Isolation					
42. I often feel people around here are not too friendly.	17	36	24	33	15
43. I often feel left out of things that are going on around here.	16	30	31	33	14
44. Sometimes I feel all alone in the world.	17	30	30	20	27
45. I don't get invited to friends' homes as often as I'd really like.	5	20	51	22	26
46. I feel that I'm losing everything I've gained in life.	6	33	35	37	14

47. I often get the feeling that my ideas are out of date.	6	33	35	37	14
48. I don't have as many good friends as I'd really like.	15	32	31	34	24
Normlessness					
49. Sometimes it's all right to get around the law if you don't actually break it.	39	28	40	8	10
50. When you want something it really doesn't matter how you go about getting it.	10	27	39	30	19
51. You have to be a little bit bad to make money these days.	6	19	28	25	46
52. To get ahead today you sometimes have to be bad as well as good.	9	29	40	23	23
53. There is little chance to get ahead on a job unless a man gets a break.	14	20	42	29	10
54. These days, getting ahead is the only thing that counts.	28	33	31	22	11

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